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MAY 31, 1987

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DEAR SIR:

I AM WRITING YOU REGARDING A PIECE OF SOFTWARE I HAVE WRITTEN THAT I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HAVING YOUR COMPANY PUBLISH.
IT RUNS ON THE T/S 2068 AND IS TITLED 'PLANET FINDER'. I HAD PREVIOUSLY SOLD IT MYSELF THROUGH A DISTRIBUTOR, BUT I CAN STILL OFFER FULL RIGHTS TO THE T/S VERSION. ENCLOSED IS A REVIEW OF MY PROGRAM FROM AN ASTRONOMY SOCIETY. A GOOD RETAIL PRICE FOR MY PROGRAM SHOULD BE AROUND THE $14.95 AMOUNT AT WHICH I HAD SOLD IT. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN EVALUATING A COPY, SIMPLY CONTACT ME.

SINCERELY,

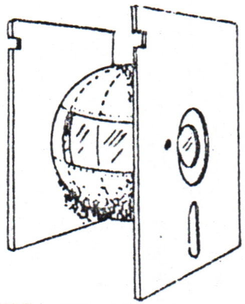
Michael Zerbo

MICHAEL ZERBO

ENCLOSURE

television rarely went beyond the "talking head" format, and computers were frequently used as electronic "duplicating machines" and "flashcards." The current limitation on the field of interactive video is the programming and not the equipment. Planetarians must go beyond traditional linear thinking to make full use of this exciting new technology.

CAIVI offers to planetarians the advantages of educational television and computer assisted instruction without the limitations of both. Once you experience the power over the screen action, you will not want to return to passive learning methods. The fun and feedback of interactive video will inspire educational applications limited only by the creativity of those who participate in its development.



THE DRIVING FORCE...A REVIEW OF ASTRONOMY COMPUTER PROGRAMS

PLANET FINDER

Michael E. Zerbo, 16 Colony Drive, West Sayville, NY 11796; Timex/Sinclair 1000, $5.95; Timex/Sinclair 2068, $~~9.95~~ 14.95

Planet Finder as a title is a misnomer. The program doesn't find planets as does an Ephemeris. It isn't Eric Burgess' Skyplot, a telescopic view of a section of the ecliptic. It also isn't Burgess' Planet Finder, a panoramic view through a picture window at a span of the Earth's horizon.

Planet Finder is a collection of astronomical images and information. It is a graphically interesting, cleverly designed visual database of solar system facts, celestial bodies and planetary configurations.

Planet Finder loads in two parts. The first program opens with a theme from a classic science fiction movie, produces an animated drawing that reminds me of a local advertisement for water beds, and finally displays a menu of four choices:

1. Load Main Program
2. Review Program Instructions
3. Review Astronomy Terms
4. Terminate Program

Option 2 contains instructions for use of the main program. Option 3 defines astronomical terms ranging from "albedo" to "terrestrial planets." Option 1 loads the main program which displays a menu of seven new choices:

1. Review Planet Information
2. Planets And Their Satellites
3. Facts About the Moon
4. Planetary Orbital Tilts
5. Weight Simulation
6. Questions About the Solar System
7. Terminate Program

Options 1 and 3 remind me of a slide set I've used in my astronomy classes. Each slide pictures one of the major objects in our solar system. Next to each picture is that body's vital statistics. These two menu options produce a screen display which differs from those slides only in regard to the position and quantity of the information.

Option 2 is simply an exhaustive listing of currently known satellites. Option 4 is a diagram with the scale exaggerated to avoid clutter. Option 5 includes a drawing of a double-pan balance. Above the balance calculations compare the weight of an object on Earth with its weight on another planet.

Option 6 is a game of trivial pursuit where the category is always astronomy. The test covers general knowledge, the terrestrial planets, the gas giants and solar system leftovers (the Sun, the Moon and Pluto).

The four test areas can be taken separately or all together. In the latter instance, a grade is given on each part and on the whole test.

The astronomical data is painstakingly accurate and up to date. It correctly shows Pluto as the smallest planet, Neptune as most distant, and Saturn as the planet with the most moons. This program is lighter to carry around than an astronomy text and a lot more fun to use.

The TS1000 version is less colorful, but it loads itself! Both are a great buy at the prices asked.

SPACEWARE-SHUTTLE DESIGNER; disk: $30.00; cassette: $27.00; J.A. Specialty Software, 3103 Meadow Brook Trace, Birmingham, AL 35243; Apple II+,e,c; Commodore 64; TI-99 4/A; Timex/Sinclair 2068

How appropriate it was to sit down in front of this program the day Shuttle Mission 51-D was launched. Senator Garn flew on 51-D, and so did Rhea Seddon, the only astronaut from my home town of Memphis. ("Cosmic Rhea" we call her.)

When I look at a new piece of software, my usual approach is to determine first how user-friendly the program is. If I can get satisfactory results from the program without relying on the documentation, then I judge it to be user-friendly. I have had to revise my definition of satisfactory results. Shuttle Designer is user-friendly but my approach toward mastery of the program has been asymptotic.

"Satisfactory" means getting the rocket you design to put the assigned payload into Earth orbit before it runs out of fuel. If you succeed, then you are given an "access" code. The code is necessary to continue so that you can design a more complicated rocket. A second success gives you a final access code. You have graduated to the point at which you are qualified to design a Space Shuttle.

Help is available. The first disk in the set of two contains an elaborate tutorial on single and multi-stage rockets, liquid and solid fuels, principles of propulsion, payload considerations and expected performance. The second disk contains the programs which accept user input to design a rocket based on the tutorial information.

A dozen or so graphic diagrams are displayed. If you have a printer, several charts summarizing fuel characteristics can be printed out to save back-tracking or hand copying to review important information.

Your patience and perseverance are rewarded by being given the opportunity to design your own rocket. You determine how much and what type of propellant to use, how fast the fuel consumption rate should be and how large a rocket to use to carry the fuel, crew and payload.

If your design has a major flaw, a member of your project team lets you know. This courtesy saves you much embarrassment on the launch pad. If the design doesn't look too bad, you are invited to witness the launch.

A twenty-five second countdown begins. Sometimes it's interrupted to correct or analyze a last minute problem. Finally the launch takes place. The rocket slowly rises. (Actually, the launch tower slowly disappears off the bottom of the screen.)

The view changes to an Earth chord with the trajectory of your rocket traced above it. Readouts below the diagram show how rapidly the rocket is accelerating and how much time has elapsed since ignition. From this point, all I have ever seen is the announcement that my rocket is out of fuel. I'm shown the projected point of impact. Well, back to the drawing board.

Shuttle Designer helps the user appreciate the planning that has gone into the American space program. It has helped me realize that I can't absorb everything that must be known about rocketry in one hour. But just give me a few more days. . . .

I thought some video games I've played were addictive! Shuttle Designer is no "Space Invaders" game. It is, however, an absorbing educational tool for individual or classroom use.